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A WORD ON THE ROADS.

UNTIL about the year 1555, the highways and byways of England were under no law, and the making and maintaining of them was left to any parties who felt interested in preserving a communication between one place and another—a state of things not very creditable to the nation; for the Romans, fifteen hundred years before, had set an example of making and keeping up great leading thoroughfares from one end of the kingdom to the other. A law at length passed on the subject in the reign of Philip and Mary laid down no general principles for road-making, further than that each parish should maintain its own roads, by means of forced labour, at the order of surveyors annually chosen by the inhabitants. Till the present day, all the parish and cross-roads are made and supported in terms of this primitive code, the forced labour, however, being generally commuted for certain exactions in cash on the lands and houses in the parish. The road rates are a kind of taxes too well known to need any particular explanation of their character.

Half a century had not elapsed from the passing of the act in the reign of Philip and Mary, when the plan of supporting all the roads on the parish system was found to be inadequate for the general accommodation. Some parishes would have the road running this way, some that way; some did not care about having roads at all; a few kept the roads in good repair; and many let them remain in the worst possible condition. Instead of utterly overthrowing this complex and clumsy arrangement, a plan was introduced for maintaining, on something like a uniform and efficient principle, certain great roads through the country. The era of this improvement was the year 1641, when the notable expedient was adopted of throwing barriers across the roads at regulated distances. For the device of turnpike gates, as they are now termed, we have therefore to thank the parliamentary wisdom of the reign of Charles I. The English by no means relished this novel method of maintaining the chief thoroughfares: it was quite opposed to all their ideas of freedom, and was so very unpopular, that for more than a century it was not adopted for any other channel of communication than that called by travellers the Great North Road, which passed through Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire. The roads, generally, remained in a disgracefully bad condition till past the middle of the eighteenth century. Even in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, they were at certain seasons scarcely passable. In 1703, when Prince George, husband of Queen Anne, went from Windsor to Petworth, to visit Charles III. of Spain, the distance being about forty miles, he required fourteen hours for the journey, the last nine taking six. The writer who re-

cords this fact says, with much simplicity, that the long time was the more surprising, as, except when overturned, or when sunk fast in the mire, his royal highness made no stop during the journey!

In 1763 turnpike gates were established in all parts of England, and since that period they have been the grand engine for supporting the principal thoroughfares, the parish and cross-roads remaining under their own local management. The history of the roads in Scotland is the same as that for England, only that the compulsory or statute labour, and also the toll system, were of later introduction. Turnpike gates did not make their appearance in Scotland for half a century after their general introduction into the neighbouring country. The first set up were also equally unpopular, and it required all the powers of the law to preserve them from destruction. By the united efforts of parish and other rates, commutation of statute labour, and revenue from tolls, the roads generally throughout Great Britain, from Cornwall to the furthest limits of Scotland, are now in excellent condition, though far from what they might be under a more rational process of management. According to returns to parliament, the length of the turnpike roads in England and Wales in 1829 was 19,798 miles, and in Scotland 3666; making a total of 23,464 miles. At the same period, the length of all the other roads was 116,000 miles; making the entire length of the public highways and byways at least 139,000 miles. In England and Wales, the number of turnpike gates was 4871; the debts on the roads amounted to £7,304,803; and the current expenditure on all the roads for one year was £1,455,291. In Scotland, the debts were £1,495,082, and the expenditure £181,028.

Such are a few of the more prominent statistics respecting the financial affairs of roads; but one still more worthy of note is the number of bodies who take on themselves the management of this vast machine. There are ten thousand parishes in England; but as many are small, and unite for road business with adjoining parishes, it is believed that there are not more than seven thousand boards of management, each with proper functionaries paid for attending to the condition of the highways. To this seven thousand are to be added the trusts appointed by the legislature to manage the turnpikes. Of this class, in 1829, there were 1119, and the number of the acts of parliament, which inspired them with life and vigour, was 3783. To keep the 19,798 miles of great roads in repair, required, we say, the apparatus of 1119 distinct trusts, 4871 toll-bars, and 3783 acts of parliament. According to this rate, a trust is required for every 17½ miles, and an act of parliament for every 5 and a fraction miles. As an act of parliament generally costs £500, the turnpike roads of England and Wales may be said to have cost £100 per mile for legislation. The ratio is somewhat different in Scotland.

In that country, a trust seems to be required for every $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and an act of parliament for every 19 and a fraction miles; which is at the rate of little more than L.26 per mile for legislation. Not bad this, however, for Scotland, considering that a number of the Highland roads are supported by government, and do not require much doctoring in the way of special acts of parliament.

Placed in this broad and grotesque light, the whole road system of Great Britain, with its eight or nine thousand managements, its endless exactions, and its universal network of toll-bars, is, without exception, the most awkward and absurd institution on the face of the earth. Laying aside altogether the loss of time, and the personal trouble and expenses of the individuals composing the trusts, the cost incurred for making and maintaining the roads is enormously disproportionate to the ends attained. No plan could have been invented to act so ruinously on the funds, as that of levying money at turnpike-gates from travellers; for the cost of a turnpike-house and gate every five or six miles, and the cost of supporting a keeper, must all fall to be deducted from the proceeds. Were it possible to institute a rigorous examination, it would probably be found that, what with charges for acts of parliament, charges for toll-houses, gates, and tariff boards, profits of lessees of gates, and support of keepers, with heavy miscellaneous charges, not more than from fifty to sixty per cent. of all the money collected is at the disposal of the trustees for behoof of the roads. In other words, from two to three pence, out of every sixpence handed to the turnpike-men, are absorbed by managerial expenses.

In a work recently published, to which we have pleasure in referring—'Road Reform,' by Mr William Pagan, a Scotch country solicitor—the ratio of managerial expenses for toll-bars is stated at nearly what we have here supposed it to be. Speaking of the counties of Fife and Kinross, the writer describes them as containing 394 miles of parish or statute-labour roads, and $461\frac{1}{2}$ of turnpike roads; total 855 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The annual average amount of all levies whatsoever for these roads is L.33,547, 7s. Of this sum, less than one-half, or only L.16,110, 17s. 7d. is expended on the ordinary repair of roads and bridges; L.7061 is disposed of for management; and the remainder goes to pay the interest, and to reduce the principal of the road debts. But this, he says, does not include the cost of local road legislation, law expenses incurred between lessees and private parties in questions of tolls, and the loss arising from the unproductive nature of toll-houses and gardens. Nine acts of parliament are at present in operation on the roads of the two counties, and the cost of these has been L.3532, 10s. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. One of them, procured in 1842, cost as much as L.575, 7s. 3d. At the renewal of the acts, equally heavy expenses will have to be incurred. Mr Pagan calculates that the annual burden for local road acts on the two counties is L.207, 6s. 1d.—a large sum for a district of country not larger than Hertfordshire. With respect to the loss incurred in erecting toll-houses, he tells us that there are within the district 78 of these establishments, independently of a large number of small lodges and collection boxes; the whole together, along with 69 steelyards, or cart-weighting machines, having cost the road funds not less than L.10,000.

Enough has now been said to show how ineconomical—or rather how positively wasteful—is the present mode

of maintaining the roads of Great Britain. But the direct pecuniary loss, bad as it is, is perhaps less grievous than the universal dissatisfaction which tolls create, their impediment to free intercourse, their injurious effects on manufactures and commerce, and their prevention of agricultural improvement. 'The whole working of turnpike tolls,' observes Mr Pagan, 'has been again and again condemned—we may almost say by the universal voice of the country—and a spirit of dissatisfaction has been roused against it, which, in South Wales particularly, very recently attempted to put down the system by physical force. In that part of the kingdom, as will be well remembered, multitudes of people met, night after night, under the leadership of Rebecca—sometimes at one point and sometimes at another—and, despite all the local authorities, straightway destroyed toll-gate after toll-gate, razing, at the same time, the toll-houses to their very foundations. In short, for a time the Rebeccaites held undoubted sway in South Wales, to the dismay of that portion of the empire, and, indeed, to the uneasiness of the government and the country at large. The military had to be called in from a distance; the London police had to locate themselves in the disturbed districts; a few, but very few, of the numerous persons concerned in the riots and in the bloodshed—for some unoffending toll-keepers suffered—were brought to justice; and it was only after measures of energy and conciliation on the part of the executive, that the disaffected were overcome and the districts restored to peace. These proceedings occasioned enormous expense.'

'In South Wales, as elsewhere, turnpike gates had been oppressively numerous, and the rates correspondingly severe. Farmers were met by tolls in every movement of their produce; they could not drive any distance after paying a toll, till, at probably the next turn, they came upon what some act of parliament had constituted a separate trust, and where they found it necessary, before going farther, to pull up and pay a second toll. A little farther on, by some other legal arrangement, there would be another trust and another toll, and so on. And, while the farmers were in the first instance the sufferers, their customers—the public at large—had to share the cost with them, the price of their produce being necessarily increased to enable them to carry on their business. Their grievances were proved before a special commission, which was appointed with a view to discover the cause of the toll-bar riots, and the remedy, and their report (6th March, 1844) forms a thick folio volume of the parliamentary papers.' The result of the inquiry was a thorough reform of the South Wales toll system. Riot, it is said to say, procured that which peaceful remonstrance failed to accomplish. By a consolidation of trusts, and a reduction of the number of turnpike-gates to one in every seven miles, her majesty's Welsh subjects have been happily pacified.

That the Scotch have not broken out into such excesses as happened in Wales, is ascribable more to the long-suffering character of our countrymen, and their commendable respect for the law, than to the mildness or equity of their toll-bar system. Edinburgh is surrounded with a mesh of thirty-five toll-bars and checks, several indecently placed within the streets of the town, and the greater number in the immediate environs. Cupar, the county town of Fife, is surrounded by thirteen toll-bars within a circuit of three miles of the market-cross, and seven of them close to the town, preventing intercourse with the adjoining fields. The author before us, however, gives even a worse case than this. Speaking of a road between Leven and Kirkcaldy, 'this

presents to the world the *beau idéal* of the toll-bar system, for there the trustees have done their work so well in the matter of toll-gates, that it is acknowledged to be quite impracticable to set foot upon the road at all without being caught by some one or other of their gates. The length of the road is just $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and we find upon it exactly 7 gates—that is, one for every mile—five of them upon the line of road, and two of them by way of supporters or check-bars. On entering this road from the east (after having paid at Lundinmill toll-gate, in the St Andrews district, only two miles back), we are taxed at Scoonie toll-gate, where we may be asked whether we are to stop at Leven, or how far we are going? and not being disposed to afford this information to our inquisitor, we ask him in turn what is the lowest sum at which he will permit us to pass his gate? He then explains that his is what is called a half toll, and, gig and all, we get through for threepence. Half a mile forward we are upon the lively town of Leven and its excellent new bridge, where we find a pontage-gate, and there both biped and quadruped must make their bow to Charon, and submit to his toll exaction. A short distance further we are upon Methil-hill toll-gate and its check, where we must pay sixpence, which clears the remaining bars on this road, as the toll-ticket thrust into our hand informs us. Armed with this passport, we get through the Percival and Bowhouse gates without further payment, and make our way to Kirkcaldy—before entering which, however, we come upon the barrier of the trustees of that district—the East Bridge toll-gate—where we have to pay our ninepence.

The prevalence of so many barriers to free intercourse, as is well known, leads to evasion in every imaginable way, it being thought quite fair to trick the toll-keeper out of his dues. A knowledge of this proneness to deception of course renders the 'pikeman churlish, and he not infrequently goes beyond the bounds of his commission. The truth is, toll-keepers give a very wide interpretation to the statute; they do not readily observe that there are no rules without exceptions. Hence a world of small litigation. Mr Pagan relates a case of a 'pikeman attempting to take toll a second time in one day for the same cart, on the plea that it was a different loading. The carter having resisted, the 'pikeman seized his horse and cart; and thence a litigation ensued. After being battled through several courts, the case was quashed, each party paying his own expenses, which amounted to L.54, 17s. for the 'pikeman, and L.124, 18s. 10d. for the carter. Besides incurring this damage, the unfortunate recusant lost his horse, which, having been put to livery by the tollman, was sold, after incurring a bill of L.18 for his keep. Both parties appear to have been the victims of an ambiguity in the act of parliament. In the following case, embracing a mixture of the dolorous with the grotesque, we are reminded of the famous litigation of *Bullum versus Boatum*. A Dumbartonshire tollman brought a passenger before a justice of peace court for attempting to cheat him of ninepence, and the charge being substantiated the passenger was fined L.2, with L.3 of expenses. But the 'pikeman had better let the case drop; for the passenger prosecuted him for an assault, and showed that he had been beat and cut at the time he attempted the evasion. The sheriff before whom this grave charge came for trial, decreed for L.14 of damages and L.2 of fine; but this not satisfying the prosecutor, he carried the case to the court of Justiciary, which increased the damages to L.100, and L.5 of fine, with expenses. The 'pikeman was doubtless left L.200 out of pocket by the transaction.

When we speak of 'pikemen suffering such awful losses, we perhaps fall into an error; for in most instances they are only servants of tacksmen, or lessees. Anciently, it was customary for poor men with wooden legs, or some other infirmity, to take a toll-bar, and on the free proceeds they were able to rear a family in something like respectability. Capital, which has spread its paws over everything, has not made an exception in favour

of this humble means of livelihood. The old wooden-leg men are now generally driven far a-field. When the day for auctioning the toll-bars of a trust arrives, capitalists, who know all about the roads and their capabilities, attend and swamp the small bidders. One man will thus take a dozen bars all round a neighbourhood, and, by employing sharp and trustworthy keepers, on whom he keeps an eye, will contrive to make a little fortune in the course of a few years. If a wooden-leg man be now anywhere seen at a toll-bar, it is only as a servant to some great master 'pikeman, or on some remote and little-frequented road.

In this way the keeping of toll-bars has been pretty generally monopolised by clusters of capitalists. Any new capitalist, not of the 'pike corporation, is well known to have no chance as a competitor; because, if a toll be knocked down to him, the enemy will drive him from the road. We have heard it confidently asserted, that any new man taking a toll-bar near London, will be ruined by those who look upon him as an intruder. They will entice all kinds of public conveyances to come by other bars; so that in the end the luckless wight is glad to give up his bargain, and retire to some new field of enterprise. These monopolists of the road are, it seems, not less sensitive on the score of intrusion by the trustees. Occasionally, trustees feel aggrieved by perceiving how profitable the toll-bars are to their lessees, and they determine to take the gates into their own hands, only employing servants as collectors. In almost every instance this turns out a false move. No such toll-bar ever pays: it is impossible it should pay: the employé, a very decent man, cannot tell how it is, but there is no money taking. Sixpence only passed yesterday, and eightpence the day before. The thing evidently won't do. Seeing that the world has resolved against travelling so long as they keep the toll-bar in their own hands, the trustees prudently put it up once more to auction, glad to rid themselves of the incumbence.

We have said so much of road mismanagement under the barbarous toll-bar system, and of the loss it causes to the country, that what we have to offer by way of reform must be stated very briefly. The whole scheme, however, may be contained in a nut-shell. Abolish the parochial or cross-road managements; abolish every kind of road-rate and statute-labour assessment; and abolish the toll-bars as one of the greatest nuisances that ever afflicted a free country. In lieu of this complicated machinery, the author of 'Road Reform' proposes to consolidate the road trusts, each to embrace a whole county, or at least a considerable district; the trusts at the same time to be somewhat more popularly constituted than they are at present. His method of raising funds to maintain all the roads and bridges in the kingdom, to pay the interest and principal of the road debts, and to liquidate every necessary expense, consists in laying a tax of 30s. annually on every horse; and to prove how well this plan would work, he enters into a calculation of what would be produced in the counties of Fife and Kinross. In that district there are 12,000 horses, by which, at 30s. per head, the sum of L.18,000 would be raised; such, as already shown, being the amount required to maintain all roads and bridges in the two shires. According to this simple plan of operation, there would, in comparison with the present absurd process of exaction, be an annual saving of L.15,000, that being the sum at present thrown away on 'pikemen and other engines of collection. To be exact, the difference between the two plans is expressed by the comparison of L.18,055, 16s. 8d. with L.33,547, 7s. What would hold good for two agricultural and populous Scotch counties, may be supposed to be answerable for Great Britain at large; and if so, then is the problem of road reform at once settled; we need not say how much to the relief of travellers, coach proprietors, agriculturalists, and the public generally. Our own ideas of road reformation would have pointed to the public revenue for the means, and to government for the

management; but, on consideration, Mr Pagan's proposal is so simple, so likely to be generally popular, besides being efficient in minor details, that we give it the preference. At all events, throwing down the subject, we leave it to fructify in the minds of our readers.

BE JUST BEFORE YOU ARE GENEROUS.

A TALE, BY MISS ANNA MARIA SARGEANT.

'HERE's a gentleman wants to know the rent of our first floor, mother,' cried little Frank Ashton, running, as he spoke, into the back parlour, where a quiet-looking young woman sat engaged with her needle. Mrs Ashton arose in haste, that she might answer the interrogation of the stranger, wondering at the same time whether her son had dignified him by the appellation of gentleman from courtesy, and thinking that if such were not the case, her accommodations would not be sufficiently good.

The question put to the child was repeated to the mother by a tall middle-aged man, whose manner and bearing bespoke him to be something above the class of persons inhabiting the little street in which he was now seeking for a home; and Mrs Ashton having answered it, led the way up the narrow but clean staircase, to tempt the stranger to the sight of her plain neatly furnished apartments. A brief survey was sufficient; and the terms being agreed upon, he begged permission to take possession of them immediately, as all the luggage he had, he said, was a portmanteau, which was at a neighbouring inn. The hesitating manner with which this request was received caused a flush to mount to his before pale cheeks. 'You require a reference, ma'am,' he quickly said; 'and it is right perhaps that you should do so of a stranger; but I have none to give. I am unknown in London, having but recently arrived from America, in which country I have spent the principal part of my life. All I can do,' he added, 'is to offer a few weeks' rent in advance.'

This reasonable apology for the want of the usual credentials satisfied the unsuspecting mind of the worthy matron, and she readily acceded to the terms, at the same time politely offering that her little handmaid should fetch his luggage. He declined smilingly, replying that he was not above carrying it himself; and adding, that he would, with her permission, employ her during his absence in lighting him a fire, and preparing the comfortable beverage of tea. 'I shall soon be quite at home here, I see,' he pursued, looking at a group of lovely children who had stolen one by one up the stair, and were now clustered at the door to get a peep at the 'strange gentleman'; and he familiarly patted the cheek of one, and stroked the glossy curls of another, as he passed.

'Oh, father, we have got such a nice new lodger,' exclaimed the three younger children in a breath as they clung about Robert Ashton's knees, 'the envied kins to share,' on his arrival at the wonted evening hour.

'A new lodger!' he repeated in some surprise, and he looked at his wife for an explanation.

Mrs Ashton in a few words related the circumstances under which she had taken in a fresh occupant for her floor, and concluded by saying that she hoped her husband would not think she had acted imprudently.

'You have acted just as I should have done had I been at home, my love,' was his reply.

'But I am not quite certain that it was exactly prudent notwithstanding,' she gaily rejoined; 'we were so unfortunate with our last lodgers.'

The conversation was broken in upon by the arrival of two young men, one of whom had been long acquainted with the family. 'Ah, Ashton, my dear fellow,' he exclaimed, as he shook him heartily by the hand; 'I knew I should find you here, like a good Benedict, by the side of your wife in your own home.'

'This is my world, Morris,' Ashton returned, as he smiled complacently on the dear ones around him.

'And a happy world it is,' rejoined his friend. 'I never leave your fireside without a determination to marry, and have such a home of my own. But to proceed to the subject which brought us hither to-night: I am come to make an appeal to your benevolence.'

'I am sorry for that, Morris,' cried Ashton, 'since my resources are pretty well exhausted. However, I am not so destitute as to be without a few shillings for a fellow-creature in need. Pray, tell me the case.'

'My good friend here is raising a subscription for the widows of the poor men who were drowned last week,' Morris made answer.

'And have you been at all successful in your errand of charity?' Ashton asked, addressing his visitor.

'Far from it,' was the reply; 'people cry out so much at the badness of the times: they have scarcely enough to enable them to be just, much less to be generous, they say.'

'That is a paltry excuse,' cried Ashton contemptuously; 'an excuse made by the niggardly to apologise for their parsimony. Alice, my love,' he added, 'draw us a jug of ale, and let us drink success to this gentleman's undertaking; meanwhile, I will subscribe my mite;' and as he spoke he placed a piece of gold in the hand of the young man.

'Oh, sir, were all the world like you, there would be no misery arising from want,' was the exclamation of his visitor, as he gazed in surprise at the liberal donation from one whose apparent circumstances scarcely warranted the hope of a fourth of the sum. 'I assure you,' he added, 'that I have talked for half an hour to men who revel in riches, and, after all, could with difficulty wring from them a small piece of silver.'

'Alas! this is a selfish world,' responded Ashton with a sigh.

'I told you that I would answer for your success there,' exclaimed Morris, when he and his companion had left the door. 'There is not a more generous fellow breathing than Bob Ashton, and yet I am afraid he is but indifferently off. I hear he is much in debt.'

'In debt?' repeated his friend in astonishment and concern. 'I wish,' he added, 'that you had informed me of that circumstance before, for I certainly would not then have made the application.'

'Why not?' interrogated Morris. 'Is a man never to give away a penny because he owes a pound?'

'His just debts have undoubtedly the first claim,' was the reply.

Whilst this conversation passed between the two friends without, a dialogue of a somewhat similar nature was carried on within. 'Mother,' cried little Frank, as with his brothers and sister he knelt at Mrs Ashton's feet to offer up their evening devotions; 'mother, tell me, if you please, which is the greatest virtue, generosity or justice.'

'Justice, my child,' was the mother's unhesitating reply.

'I thought so,' pursued the little inquirer; 'but I was not quite sure.'

'I am glad that you asked me, then, my dear boy, she tenderly returned, bending to kiss his glowing cheek as she spoke; 'I am very glad that you asked me, because I wish you to bear that in mind through life. Generosity,' she pursued, 'is a brilliant quality, which attracts general admiration; but it may be possessed by persons wanting in almost every other virtue. Men who have set at naught every moral, social, and divine law, have been frequently known to be eminent for generosity; whereas justice is of so solid a character, that it can scarcely dwell in a soil which has not some other excellences.'

'But we may admire generosity if it be in a robber, may we not?' asked the child, looking earnestly in his mother's face.

Mrs Ashton smiled. 'We can scarcely do otherwise than admire that which is in itself lovely, be it found where it may,' she made answer; 'but we must never, my dear Frank, let our admiration get the better of our

judgment, or we may be led to imitate the vices and failings of an individual, because there is some shining quality about them. 'The generosity of some persons,' she pursued, 'is an impulse, producing that indiscriminating charity which frequently encourages vice, and does more evil than good; and that benevolence is only worthy of admiration which flows from a sense of duty to God and our fellow-creatures.'

'Dear mother,' resumed the child, encouraged by her gentle tones to proceed, 'I think it must have been a struggle between generosity and justice that I felt this morning, when I was coming back from the toy-shops after buying my humming-top. I met a poor blind man looking so hungry and cold, that I could not help wishing I had seen him in my way there, that I might have given him the money instead of laying it out for a toy; and whilst I was thinking so, a gentleman near me dropped a shilling from his purse without noticing it. This shilling, thought I, would buy the poor beggar man two or three meals, and the gentleman looks as if it could be no object to him to lose it.'

'And what did you do, my dear?' Mrs Ashton with eagerness inquired, seeing the boy hesitate whether to proceed.

'Why, mother,' he returned, 'I must confess that I was strongly tempted to conceal the money, and afterwards give it to the beggar; but that little voice which you have told me was conscience, softly whispered that it would be a theft, as much as if I had taken it out of the gentleman's purse with my own hands, and that I had no right to be generous with that which was not my own; so I gave the gentleman his shilling, and left the poor blind man without. Did I do right, mother?'

'Quite right, my dear boy,' Mrs Ashton exclaimed, folding him in her maternal embrace; 'we certainly ought never to do evil that good may come, and I trust this little incident will be a lesson to you through life, never to sacrifice what you know to be right to gratify even such an honourable feeling as benevolence, or in any way compromise justice for the sake of indulging in generosity.'

'Alice, my love,' cried Ashton, when Bessie had taken the children to their chamber, and they were left alone, 'I thought you praised the probity of our dear little boy to the exclusion of his warmer feelings; surely some word of commendation was due to the kind wish which would have given up the humming-top he has so long been setting aside his pocket money to purchase, for the sake of affording a meal to a fellow-creature in want?'

'Your experience in the world must have led you to observe how often such impulses end where they began—in wishes,' she smilingly returned. 'The benevolence which I deem most worthy of commendation is active. In the case of our little Frank, however, I believe it to have been sincere,' she added; 'and the only fear is, of its becoming too exuberant.'

'Too exuberant! Do you deem it possible for it to be too exuberant? Can we be too self-sacrificing for the good of others, Alice?'

'Nay, my dear Robert,' she gently returned; 'we cannot, I think, be too self-sacrificing; but we may sacrifice one duty in order to practise another; and it was the triumph of right over false reasoning that I thought the most worthy of notice in the little transaction which our dear boy was relating.'

'We differ a little, Alice, in our ideas of generosity,' Ashton interposed; 'and yet,' he quickly added, 'it is only with your theory that I quarrel—with your practice, my love, I find no fault.'

'It were better to be defective in theory than in practice,' she gaily returned; 'but I only contend that, to be really valuable, generosity must be united with other moral virtues, and with justice in particular, otherwise its lustre fades into comparative nothingness.'

Ashton sat musing, but did not reply; and the entrance of Bessie with the supper put a period to the conversation.

Week after week passed away, and Mrs Ashton had

no cause to be dissatisfied with her new lodger, who was found to possess those two virtues which are of the highest esteem in the opinion of the lodging-house keeper—quietness, and regularity in the payment of rent. Meanwhile, the strange gentleman (for such he was still denominated) made rapid progress in the favour of every member of the family. Frank was delighted with his glowing accounts of the wild scenery of America—the younger children with his willingness to share in their gambols. Ashton felt interested in him from the very fact of his being apparently friendless and unfortunate, and Alice from a combination of all.

'Oh, father, the strange gentleman is gone,' was the simultaneous exclamation of the little group one evening as Robert Ashton entered his home.

'Gone!' he repeated in surprise. 'Is this information true, my love?' he interrogated, addressing his wife.

'Too true,' she returned, whilst a tear stole down her cheek in spite of her efforts to repress it. 'He is gone, my dear Robert, under circumstances of a most painful nature.'

'Yes, father, the men took him away; and mother says they will not let him come back again to play with us,' pursued the little prattlers.

Ashton turned to the mother for an explanation. 'The poor man was arrested this morning, and carried off to the Fleet prison,' she said; 'but I believe from a few words which were dropped, that there was some injustice in the transaction. It appears to be for the expenses of a lawsuit which he has been urged to engage in on false grounds by the very person who has now arrested him.' Ashton uttered an ejaculation of indignant feeling, and was adding a somewhat illiberal and sweeping remark upon the legal profession, when his wife interrupted him by observing that the best way to show his sympathy would be for him to offer his services to the stranger in such a time of need, which, she doubted not, would be most acceptable, as he appeared not to have a friend in London.

'You are right, my love,' he returned; 'I may perhaps procure his enlargement by becoming bail for him.'

'Do nothing precipitately, dear Robert,' exclaimed his wife; 'you know nothing of his character, and his name has only this day become known to us.'

'Yes, we found out his name, poor gentleman, through the bailiffs,' cried Bessie, who was in the parlour busily employed preparing tea. 'They asked for Mr Paul Logan, and when I said I didn't know such a person, but that I would ask the gentleman on our first floor if that was his name, they followed me up the stairs.'

'Logan, did you say—Paul Logan?' Ashton exclaimed.

'Yes, sir, I know it was that, for I thought it a strange outlandish name.'

'Do you know the name, Robert?' Alice asked in surprise, for she could not but notice that it had awakened some unpleasant feelings in the breast of her husband.

'Yes—that is, I once knew a family of the name of Logan,' was his reply. 'But are you sure it was Paul Logan?' he further interrogated; and Bessie, nothing loath to be a speaker, proceeded to attest the truth of her assertion by saying that she heard the bailiffs call him by that name several times.

'Are you ill, dear Robert?' cried Mrs Ashton in alarm, perceiving with the quick eye of love that a sudden paleness had overspread her husband's cheek.

'I am not quite well,' he faintly replied, leaning his head upon his arm as he spoke.

Alice flew to offer him a cup of the refreshing beverage she had just prepared. 'I shall not be able to go out to-night, my love,' he said; 'I will retire to bed; perhaps a night's rest may restore me to myself. Alice urged that medical advice should be procured; but he positively refused to permit it, requesting only her assistance in ascending the stairs to his chamber.'

The duties of the mother called Mrs Ashton from the

side of her husband, but her thoughts wandered as she gathered her little ones around her. The sudden indisposition of Ashton had obviously arisen from the associations connected with Mr Logan's name; and yet, strange to say, she had never heard him mention it before. A vague foreboding of evil came over her; though she called into exercise that strength of mind which was natural to her character, and strove to repel it.

Ashton attempted to dissipate the fears of his wife, by making light of his indisposition; but perceiving that he was really ill, she positively refused to retire to rest, and taking up her needlework, she seated herself quietly by his bedside, assuring him with a smile of affection that a night thus spent would do her no injury. Finding her resolute in her determination, he resisted no longer, and strove to compose himself for sleep; but vain was the attempt. 'Tired nature's sweet restorer' fled from his pillow, and he lay tossing from side to side in a state of feverish excitement, which called forth the worst fears in his anxious partner. 'You must allow me to send for medical aid as soon as it is light,' she tenderly said, as she took his burning hand within hers, and counted the quick throbbings of his pulse.

Ashton shook his head.

'Nay, I must act without your concurrence for once, then,' she returned, 'for I deem it my duty to do so; you are now in a state to attend to your business as usual.'

'Medicine cannot minister to a mind diseased, dearest Alice,' he made answer.

'A mind diseased!' she repeated. 'Oh! my beloved husband, if your malady is of the mind, why not confide in the faithful breast of one who would sympathise in all your sorrows, and do her utmost to alleviate them?'

'I shrink from telling you the cause of my distress, my own Alice,' he passionately returned, 'because I could not endure the thought of sinking in your esteem; but now I feel that I can bear this torturing concealment no longer; and though it lead you to despise me, I must tell you all.'

'Despise you, dear Robert!' the wife exclaimed, while her mild eyes filled with tears; 'surely you cannot have been guilty of anything so heinous as to call forth such feelings from me? Speak freely, my husband; open your whole heart to me, and no word of reproof shall, I promise you, escape me.'

'It is not your reproaches I fear, dearest Alice,' he made answer. 'I know you are too kind to inflict further torture; but your nice sense of justice will recoil from the conduct of your erring husband, though he may not have acted as the world in general would censure. No, it is not your words of condemnation I shrink from, but the verdict of your upright heart.'

'The pangs of self-reproach are far more bitter to endure than any other,' the wife interposed; 'and these,' she added, 'may perhaps be removed. If you have, as your words seem to indicate, committed an act of injustice, is there no way of making reparation?'

'None, none,' was his reply, and he buried his face in his hands in an agony of grief.

'Say not so, my husband,' she soothingly rejoined; 'let me hear the circumstances, and we will together see if reparation be impossible; perchance it is not quite so difficult as you imagine.'

'It can only be accomplished by reducing you, my Alice, and our children to beggary,' he exclaimed bitterly.

'And do you think that I would shrink from sharing poverty with you?' she asked.

'You might not, my dearest Alice; your firm mind would, I feel assured, meet any exigence; but I must be the basest of men to put you to the trial. No, let me suffer alone.'

'You cannot suffer alone,' pleaded the wife; 'every throb of your heart is responded by mine, and with tenfold acuteness. But I must hear your confession, and we will then decide upon the right course to be pursued.'

Ashton raised himself on his pillow: never had he

felt so truly humbled as at this moment. So full of self-love is the human heart, that it not unfrequently feels less compunction in committing error than in acknowledging it.

'You have often heard me speak of my father,' he began, 'as a man proverbial for his integrity; indeed so much so, that his word was deemed of more value than the bond of most men. But this character for probity has unfortunately been the means of throwing temptation in the path of his less high-principled son. Amongst his acquaintances was a person of the name of Logan. This gentleman was far his superior in birth and education, yet a warm friendship existed between them, which was only terminated by death. Mr Logan died in the prime of life, leaving my father his executor and guardian to his children, who were handsomely provided for; but a fit of apoplexy shortly after carried him also to the grave. It was not till after my parent's decease that I became aware of the extent of the trust reposed in him by his friend; and this intelligence was communicated to me through the medium of a letter I found amongst his papers, which was addressed to me, in case of any accidents befalling him. He began by informing me that Mr Logan had a son by a former marriage, who had left his home, and (it was supposed) embarked for America, owing to the unkind treatment he had received from his stepmother. Of this youth no tidings had ever after been heard; yet the father cherished the hope that he lived, and would some day return to his family. With this impression on his mind, he lodged the sum of five hundred pounds in the hands of his friend, trusting to his known integrity for its being safely delivered to his unfortunate son, should he ever appear; for so entirely had he been governed by his second wife, that he dared not make any provision for him in his will; thus the transaction was only known to themselves.' Ashton here paused to wipe the cold damps from his brow; then looking earnestly at his wife, hurriedly added, 'You surmise the rest, dear Alice; you see the brink upon which I stood. My father adjured me to preserve the sum, and permit the interest to accumulate, with the same scrupulous integrity as he himself would have done, and on no account to appropriate any part of it to my own use. But I was young, and almost unprovided for, my love—for you also had its share in making the temptation stronger. I knew that your parents would object to my suit had I nothing to commence the world with, and I purchased the furniture of our house, and the business in which I am engaged, with Paul Logan's property, and now retributive justice has brought the man I have injured to my very home.' As the unhappy young man spoke, he clasped his hands in an agony of grief, and sunk exhausted upon the pillow from which he had raised himself.

No burst of anguish, however, escaped the lips of his firm-minded wife. She sat a few moments in silence; and that brief time was sufficient to show her the course which her husband ought to pursue. 'Give not way to unavailing sorrow, dearest Robert,' she tenderly said; 'the past, though lamentable, cannot be recalled; the present only is our own, and it calls but for promptitude and strength of mind. The line of duty is straight and obvious, and however repugnant to our feelings, must be adhered to.'

'Alice, would you have me make you and our children beggars to enrich a stranger?' he almost fiercely asked.

'No, my husband,' she gently replied; 'it will not be to enrich a stranger, but to perform an act of justice; nor shall we, I trust, be reduced quite so low as you represent.'

'I see no alternative but absolute ruin if I attempt to refund the money,' he cried, 'and that is too serious a matter to be decided upon rashly.'

'I do not advocate rashness,' returned the wife, 'but the course which alone can restore your self-respect, and consequently your peace of mind. Oh, my husband,'

she energetically added, as she sunk on her knees beside his bed, 'make, I intreat you, no compromise with your conscience. It has, I feel assured, already pointed out the right path for your pursuit; and however humiliating, however detrimental to your interests, or even to the interests of those whom I know you love dearer than yourself, I beseech you swerve not from it.'

'Alice,' cried Ashton, whilst his voice became almost choked by strong emotion, 'have you taken into consideration that to make up this sum I must dispose of my business, which is our only means of support; that we must part with the furniture of our house; and, what is even worse, I must be myself liable to become an inhabitant of a prison for debts it will then be out of my power to liquidate?'

'Debts!' the wife repeated, with surprise and concern; 'I was not aware, Robert, that you were in debt. I understood that, having commenced business with a small capital, you had avoided contracting any, and I thought that our expenditure was rather within our income.'

'It was so till within the last twelve months,' Ashton in some confusion returned, 'when,' he added, 'I was what you, Alice, will perhaps call foolish enough to do a generous action. To serve my old friend Johnson, I accepted some bills to a larger amount than was perhaps consistent with prudence, and the result was, I was obliged to pay them.'

Alice sighed deeply. 'And why,' she gently asked, 'did you not name this to me before? I would have made any sacrifices at home rather than that you should be involved in difficulties in your business.'

'I should soon have recovered these slight embarrassments, my love,' he rejoined, 'and I could not bear that you should be made unhappy by them; but now, if I follow your counsel, and part with all to refund this five hundred pounds, and the interest, my creditors will of course come upon me for the debts, and I must become insolvent.'

This was a fresh blow to the feelings of the unhappy wife, and she sat for some time in silent thoughtfulness. Meanwhile Ashton, who shrunk still more from the acknowledgment of his breach of trust to the world than he did from the poverty it would involve, was planning some compromise. 'Alice,' he at length exclaimed, 'I have come to the determination of seeing Mr Logan in the morning, and gaining from him if possible an account of the distresses under which he labours. I may be able to serve him without utterly ruining myself and family.'

Alice forbore to say more at present; she saw that his health was already seriously impaired by the excitement of his mind, and she resolved to await the result of his visit to the prison, ere she urged a course which she still saw to be the only right one, however great the sacrifice might be.

The temporary relief Ashton found in the plan he had proposed so far tranquillised him, as to enable him to arise and put it into execution. Mr Logan was overwhelmed with astonishment and gratitude at what he deemed the generous interest taken in his affairs by a stranger, and consequently became as communicative as he had hitherto been reserved. The world, he said, had, from his very boyhood, used him so roughly, that he scarcely believed in the existence of disinterested kindness; and then followed the tale of his early life, which was too well known to his auditor. He further stated, that after spending more than twenty years in America, during which time he had met with misfortunes of various kinds, he had accidentally heard of the death of his father, and supposing that some of his property had been bequeathed to him in common with his other children, he had come over to England for the express purpose of examining the will. This examination, he said, had proved unsatisfactory, his name not being included; but having reason to suspect, from the circumstance of his relatives affecting to disbelieve in his identity, that a forgery had been practised, he had consulted an attorney, who, as appeared from his subsequent conduct,

basely encouraged him to engage in a lawsuit for the purpose of involving him in expenses; when, upon discovering that he was unable to pay but in the event of success, he had not only stopped the proceedings, but arrested him for the sum already due, which amounted to forty pounds.

The feelings of the self-condemned Ashton may be more easily imagined than described, as he was compelled to express indignation at injustice which he could not but own was not more worthy of censure than that he had himself been guilty of, and to listen to protestations of gratitude from the man whom he had in reality so deeply injured. The sum of forty pounds, though more than his present means could command, might, he thought, be without difficulty borrowed of those friends whom he had so often served; and he consequently ventured to promise it, making his anxiety to get the matter settled a pretext for hurrying away.

Mr Logan had implied that it was now his desire to return to America as soon as he could obtain his enlargement, from whence he hoped to remit the sum which Mr Ashton had so generously proffered, though, he said, he should ever deem himself his debtor. This intelligence Ashton joyfully communicated to his wife, whom he found awaiting his return with the most intense solicitude; but she, to his disappointment, felt no satisfaction at the prospect. He thought that time would enable him to repair the injustice he had committed without having any definite plan in view. But the conscience of Alice was not so easily silenced: she saw that justice demanded immediate reparation, and she would have cheerfully submitted to the sacrifices it would necessarily involve—nay, she had already formed projects by which her personal exertions were to assist her husband in the maintenance of the family, and dwell with pleasure on the peace of mind they should experience in the midst of privation arising from the performance of a right action.

Ashton found the task of borrowing forty pounds less easy than he had at first imagined. After spending the day in going from house to house with little success, he was compelled to raise the greater part of the sum by pledging his watch and some other articles of value; and this done, he lost no time in procuring the release of his lodger. Mr Logan's return was hailed with delight by all save Alice, who, under any other circumstances, would have been the first to 'rejoice with those that do rejoice'; but her oppressed heart could feel no satisfaction whilst her husband's integrity was at stake. She listened with a sickening spirit to the warm eulogiums bestowed upon him by the man whom he had injured, and the singularity of her manner led her lodger to suspect that she had disapproved of the exertions Ashton had made in his behalf; yet this supposition was so opposed to the general tenor of her conduct, that he found it difficult to comprehend the apparent anomaly.

Ere Mr Logan quitted England, he obtained the advice of an eminent professor of the law upon the probable issue of the suit he had before taken in hand, and received information that it was hopeless. Ashton knew too well the circumstances of the case, and the illegality of the claim; but he dared not hint at his knowledge, and was even fearful of offering the advice he would have otherwise given, lest it should betray his secret. 'It is somewhat singular,' Logan observed, as he returned from his last examination of the will at Doctor's Commons—'it is very singular; but it was, I find, a person of your name, a Mr Robert Ashton, who was made my father's executor; and but for the high character he bore in the neighbourhood for integrity, I should have suspected him of collusion with my family.'

Ashton endeavoured to imply surprise by a sudden ejaculation; but his lips moved in vain—his tongue could not articulate a syllable.

'He died of apoplexy twelve months after my father, I heard,' Logan pursued, 'and his son married, and came to reside in London; but no one could give me any

further intelligence concerning him. I don't know that it would avail me anything," he added, "but I should like to have seen the young man before I left England; he might have thrown some light upon the matter."

"Possibly so," Ashton, with a strong effort at composure, remarked; "but London is a wide place, and the name is a very common one."

"My circumstances will not admit of further delay," Logan rejoined. "The situation I gave up in order to inquire into this affair may yet be vacant, and I am anxious to return, if it were only in order to repay the sum you have so generously raised for me; but perhaps you will bear it in mind, and, when you can do so without any inconvenience or loss of time, make inquiry for me. I know not another person in London that I could ask."

This last remark caused Ashton to breathe a little more freely, and he with apparent readiness promised to comply with the request. This discovery of the name was a fresh source of disquiet to the self-condemned young man; for he could feel no security whilst his lodger yet remained in England; but, fortunately for him, Mr Logan was, though from different motives, equally anxious for his departure. Many tears were shed by the little ones when he bade them adieu; and even Bessie Brown lamented him, and readily forgave the concealment of his name, which she now saw arose not from any disgrace attached to it, but the false pride men of birth and education are apt to feel when in reduced circumstances.

Month after month passed away, and the family of the Ashtons were, to the eyes of their neighbours and friends, equally prosperous and happy as before; but there was a canker in the bosom of the elder members of which the world knew nothing. Alice was still the same gentle affectionate being, ever studying the comfort of those around her; but her society was less attractive to her husband, from the knowledge that he had sunk in her esteem. She, from regard to his feelings, seldom alluded to the affair, or even mentioned the name of their late lodger; but he could not but see that it was constantly in her thoughts, and that she ceased to enjoy the comforts of her home, because they were purchased at the sacrifice of duty.

Mr Logan was punctual in the performance of his engagement to refund the forty pounds; but Ashton could feel no pleasure in receiving it, but was rather pained by an act of justice in one from whom he felt he did not deserve it.

It was nearly twelve months subsequent to the departure of Mr Logan for America, that Alice was called upon to fulfil the melancholy duty of attending the deathbed of her only remaining parent. Mr Crosby was a man who had been esteemed prudent even to parsimony; but he had brought up a numerous family in respectability, and realised sufficient in trade to enable him to retire and spend the residue of his days free from the cares of business. It was generally supposed that he would have but little to leave at his death; but to the great surprise of his daughter Alice, who was the youngest, and had always been his favourite, he with his dying breath revealed to her that he had set aside for her the sum of four thousand pounds, adding that he had settled it exclusively upon herself, that it might not be touched by her husband. Alice listened to this information with feelings far from pleasurable. "Oh, my father," she exclaimed, "let not your last act be one of injustice. I have no right to the whole of this sum. An equal distribution would be much more agreeable to my feelings, and the few hundred pounds which would be my rightful share would make me—very happy she was about to add, for her thoughts were full of the idea of releasing her beloved husband from the weight on his conscience, but the melancholy spectacle before her repressed the ebullition of joy. The dying man could not but admire his daughter's noble act; but it was too late for him to legally repair the injury he had done his other children. She assured him, however, that she

would scrupulously divide the property, and not only so, but make known that such was his latest wish.

The grief of Alice Ashton upon the occasion of her parent's death was much softened by the happy circumstances attending it. She had a double opportunity of exercising that justice she had ever extolled, and the purity of her motives was displayed in the manner in which it was accomplished. The fact of the money having been designed for herself was kept a profound secret, excepting to those persons from whom it could not be concealed; and as she placed her own share in the hands of her husband, and begged him to use it for repairing the breach of trust which had caused them so much pain, she felt a tranquillity of spirit it was long since she had enjoyed.

Ashton saw too clearly how much happiness the payment of the sum would cause his inestimable wife, to make any scruples about depriving her of it. But the next subject for consideration was the manner in which it was to be done. He still shrank from the exposure of his unfaithfulness to the trust reposed in him, and proposed availing himself of the opportunity given by Mr Logan's commission to discover the son of the executor. It would be easy, he said, to inform him that he had been so fortunate as to meet with the young man, and that he had through his medium conveyed to him the sum, with interest, left in the care of the deceased Mr Robert Ashton. The distance at which Mr Logan resided would, he thought, prevent all further knowledge of the matter, and he should be spared the humiliation of confession. Alice consented to, without approving of the plan, and it was immediately put into execution.

Ashton was in daily and somewhat anxious expectation of an answer to his communication to Logan, when, to the surprise of both husband and wife, that gentleman made his appearance at their door. His hearty greeting met with a restrained reception on their part, which excited his surprise; but attributing it to the circumstance of his sudden and unexpected arrival, he proceeded to inform them that it was his wish to again engage their apartments, if vacant, as he had business which would detain him in London for a few weeks. After thanking them in the warmest terms for the share they had taken in restoring to him his right, Mr Logan expressed a wish to see the noble young man who had so faithfully fulfilled the trust reposed in him.

"You behold him before you—I am he," Ashton exclaimed, seeing all further concealment would be impossible; "but I am not," he bitterly added, "the noble young man you suppose. So far from faithfully fulfilling, I have basely betrayed the confidence placed in my integrity, and, but for this excellent woman, should never have made the reparation I have done."

Logan stood paralysed with astonishment, and Alice burst into tears.

"I was too cowardly to reveal the truth even when I had the means of doing justice," Ashton resumed, whilst the changes in his countenance evinced the strong workings of his soul; "but retribution follows, and I am not allowed to escape the humiliation of confession. Let your contempt, however, fall on me alone, for I alone deserve it. My angel wife was not a sharer in the crime; but she it was who, by a noble self-sacrifice, made the restitution."

"You will not—you are too generous to treat my unhappy husband with contempt," pleaded Alice, now coming forward. "The temptation to use the property was strong, when your long absence gave grounds for belief in your death; and when he, by the discovery of your name, ascertained the injury he had done you, the reparation would have effected the ruin of his own family. These considerations will, I am sure, soften your resentment, Mr Logan," she pursued. "My husband may have been culpable, but he is not so base as intentionally to wrong any one."

It was some time before Logan could recover his astonishment sufficiently to speak; but when he did so, it was not to upbraid, but to soothe the self-condemned

young man and his weeping partner. Grateful for this delicate consideration for his feelings, Ashton now frankly related every circumstance connected with the transaction, to which his auditor listened with mingled sensations of pleasure and pain. His admiration of the conduct of Alice amounted almost to veneration, and for her sake alone he could have overlooked the tardy justice of her husband. But there was in his character also something to admire, though much to lament. So deep was his contrition for the error he had committed, that there is little probability of its recurrence, even should a similar temptation assail him; and he now sees the necessity of enforcing upon his children the truth he once deemed a fallacy, that impulsive generosity is frequently accompanied by weakness of character, and that it is only when it becomes ennobled by being associated with justice, that it is really estimable in itself, or extensively beneficial in its results.

PROPOSALS FOR A NEW ORDER OF MERIT.

THERE WAS once such a thing as the Golden Age. I am persuaded one of its chief constituent features must have been there being no authors in it. Men were then innocent of all crimes, writing books included. Delightful age, too good by far to last! Error and writing came together, and the Golden Age was no more. It is remarkable how soon the world came to be marked by this dismal propensity to scribbling. Look we in upon it three thousand years ago, we find the Jewish sage declaring that of writing of books there was no end. Glance at it two thousand years ago, we see Horace bewailing how, learned and unlearned, all were writing. At the present time, the evil has reached a magnitude which seriously threatens all domestic comfort. The difficulty is now to find a man or woman who does not write. A gentleman proposed to us one day to compile a dictionary of living authors. 'It is done already, sir,' said we; 'have you ever seen a book called Pigot's Directory?' There is a story told of a gentleman who, having a great detestation of authorship and authorcraft, but at the same time liking men of sense and ability, went about for some years in search of such a person who should not have written a book. There was no appearance of success, till one night, travelling from Selkirk to Edinburgh by the coach, he found in one of his travelling companions all the requisites of intelligence and pleasant manners, without the smallest trace of any connection with the press. He felt sure he had at length found the proper person, and longed for morning light to enable him to behold the man whom he was to take to his heart of hearts. The coach stopped at its destination while it was still dark; the stranger came out into the lamp-light. The friend-seeker rushed to examine him, when, behold, the chatty, agreeable, and apparently non-literary stranger proved to be no other than Walter Scott, by that time the author of a century of volumes. The story concludes by representing the inquirer as vanishing in an agony of despair.

And well he might, for evidently there is hardly any such person now living. I have a faint recollection of meeting just one man in very early life, who was clever and agreeable, and yet was *said* not to have written anything; but I cannot be quite sure of his innocence. Perhaps, if rigid inquiry were made, he might be found to have produced a dozen condemned plays, or a score of still-born volumes. Not the daylight lantern of Diogenes, not the offer of a premium of fifty guineas in the Times, could now elicit the happy individual who has not at some time tormented his fellow-creatures with pen and ink. It is a terrible case. We used to have

strong edicts long ago in our nursery against that state of things when all speak and nobody hears; but what is that to a grown up world in which everybody writes and no one reads?

Clearly, something ought to be done—but what? An association binding the members to buy no new books—that would be of no avail, for the want of sale has evidently no terrors for the literary tribe. A Society for the Suppression of Superfluous Literature by positive means—that would only do harm, for everybody would fly to see the books which had been proscribed by such a grave and reverend body. Might the interference of the legislature be looked for? Or would it be of avail? Doubtless, the British legislature would do anything in reason for the discouragement of authors. See already that well meant, though, after all, but little effectual measure, the taxing of paper equally which sells over the booksellers' counter, and which goes to the trunk-maker. But I fear that the legislature has done its best already; it has exhausted its means of repressing the literary trade. Fiscal measures evidently won't do. Suppose a bill to fine publishers for every bad book they brought out? Alas! the publishers already do their very utmost to keep bad books from appearing. One half their time is occupied in declining offered manuscripts, and battling off print-determined poets and sages. Murray has had to refuse a volume of poems regularly once a fortnight ever since he ceased to publish for Byron. Should there be a tax, then, on all books? No use. They would be printed on the continent, and smuggled in. No, nothing of that kind will do. What, what, then, should be done?

We must look to the human nature of the case, and address ourselves to that. The literary mania mainly arises from an activity of the organ of love of approbation. Could we turn this to operate for the abandonment instead of the taking up of the pen, the object would be attained. Here, unquestionably, lies the key of the question. But how could men and how could women—how, in short, could the men, women, and children who write—be tempted through their love of approbation not to write? Easily enough. This is a matter calling for the interference of the fountain of honour. Establish an order of merit for the positive reward of such persons as resist the temptations of the pen. If it were understood that, on proof being afforded of twenty years having been spent in public life without any connexion with the press, one were entitled to be a claimant for the star of some kind of legion, certainly a vast influence would be exerted for keeping men unspotted by ink. They would deliberate thus with themselves: 'If I print, I perhaps acquire celebrity, perhaps not. But, if I don't print, I am sure of being a Knight of the Order of the Inverted Ink-bottle. Of course, I shan't print.' There might be difficulty in the details, particularly as to the authentication of the proper qualifications. A man might have published anonymously, and it might be difficult to convict him. But even though doubtful cases might thus arise, there would still be enough of certain ones to operate in inducing men to keep out of print. Let it be understood that the faintest ground of suspicion had a condemnatory effect, and you would see few suspicious cases. There should of course be various degrees of honour, bearing some proportion to the degrees of self-denial exercised. Those who only could say, 'We received a good education, and have been careful not to abuse it by becoming authors, would constitute the great first rank. A simple ribbon would serve to distinguish them. When any one had it to say, 'I made a tour on the continent, and never put pen to paper on the subject,' or, 'I once preached a funeral sermon, which the friends asked me to print, and I refused,' then that man should have some higher honour. The intimate friend of a great man who abstained from writing his life in two octavo volumes after his death, would deserve one of considerable distinction. And when it could be fully and satisfactorily established of any otherwise qualified man, that he had passed the

age of twenty-one, in love, and yet abstained from printing a volume of poems, he should be made a knight-commander at the least. What I calculate on is this, that, by such means, all the finer spirits would be diverted from the walks of literature, and the blacking of paper be left only to a few abandoned persons, whose characters would soon bring it into such odium, that books would become duly rare, and only appear under the pressure of exigent occasions.

The proposed arrangement would undoubtedly serve for all those cases in which the moving cause was of an amateur character. But what to do with the vast class where the impulse comes from the desire of making a livelihood? Here I would suggest a humane extension of the poor-law act. To take away all excuse from those who profess to scribble for bread, there might be a department in the union workhouses for their reception, provided with stones to be broken for roads, and old ropes to be teased into oakum, or employed in any other way that might be thought advantageous. The application of such a test to the scribblemania would, I apprehend, be effectual. It would then be seen, when any one continued to pester the public with his books, that not bread but notoriety was the object, and, cut off by unrelenting booksellers, and a pocket-buttoned public, he would be compelled to give up his pursuit, and become a useful, or at least not a troublesome member of the community.

Thus, by one means and another, it might be hoped that society would be restored to a healthy tone, and human genius turned to good and serviceable courses, instead of being misexpended as at present. I can imagine the gradual operation of such measures—here a gentleman amateur converted from a tendency to print, there a poor-devil author rescued from literature, and set to an honest trade, like the appearance of hill-top after hill-top on the subsidence of the Flood. Perhaps, in the course of ten years, we should be finding it possible to pass a day without being asked if we have read such a book, or to enter a drawing-room where we should not have to stand in instinctive horror of two authoresses. Oh, Saturnian time! shall we ever see thee thus return?

AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN EGYPT.

THIRTY years ago 'the land of Egypt' was looked upon with awe. Its gigantic temples, whose origin dates beyond the records of history; its mysterious pyramids and puzzling sphinxes; its gorgeous tombs, and its mummies preserved for more than two thousand years, with the names, residences, and professions of the defunct as accurately inscribed in hieroglyphics as the epitaph on a tomb-stone cut yesterday—naturally excited feelings of veneration, that were consecrated in the mind by the biblical associations with which the mysterious banks of the Nile are connected.

Now, however, the powers of steam and the march of inquiry are fast dispelling the clouds of mystery in which Egypt was wrapt. It is no longer a rarity to meet with a traveller who has mounted the pyramid of Cheops, or stood in the halls of Karnak. Rapid and easy communication with Europe has covered the country with a varnish of utter modernness. European merchants set up their shops under the very eye of Cleopatra's needle: the harbour which was ploughed by the argoes of Mark Antony, is now hourly agitated by the paddles of steamboats; and in the city founded by Alexander the Great, Italian operas are performed at least once in every week 'during the season.' Huge cotton mills rear their ugly fronts not far from some of the grandest architecture in the world; and to crown all, the track of the exode of the Israelites has been recently surveyed by that eminent engineer Mr Gallo-

way, with a view to a railway between Grand Cairo and that part of the Red Sea in which Pharaoh and all his hosts were drowned.

Over these innovations and commonplace novelties the antiquary and reader of Herodotus sincerely mourns; but we cannot wholly sympathise with his lamentations. The means by which this amalgamation of the old with the new has been effected is also the means of extended intercourse with our eastern brethren, which has immense advantages. It breaks down the barriers of prejudice, across which each party steps to mingle and to fraternise. The Mussulman no longer insults the Christian by the name of 'dog,' and we, on our part, cease to regard Mahomedanism as the sensual, immoral creed which it was formerly believed to be. The people of the East, and those of the West, are daily coming to an improved understanding, and to regard each other with a charity which increases in degree on further acquaintance. By means of this feeling, the blessings of knowledge are spread, and commercial communication—the mainspring of social comfort between whatever countries it exists in—is augmented. These are far more substantial advantages than can be derived from a dreamy admiration of the monuments of antiquity, or from the ultra-conservative efforts of those who, to preserve traces of the past, would damage the prospects of the future. Still, to such enthusiasts the union of the modern with the ancient, which the outward and visible signs of Egypt present, are extremely distressing. Five-and-twenty years ago, an amateur of the antique happened to see a lady's-maid in a pink spencer amongst the ruins of Thebes. This so shocked his notions, that he made the best of his way back to France. 'Having,' he says, 'no longer any desire to look at anything, I departed that very night.' What would he say now, when with every Indian mail dozens of English damsels pass through Lower Egypt; when a European female is by no means a rarity in the streets of Alexandria; and when there is a lady who is now actually residing in Grand Cairo? It is to introduce this lady to our readers that the foregoing remarks have been made.

One effect steam communication seems to have had, is to extinguish in the European fair sex all dread of trusting themselves in the land of harems. Till the authoress of 'The Englishwoman in Egypt,'* whose work we have just perused, none had been bold enough to choose that country as her abode. This lady—Mrs Poole, sister of Mr Edward Lane, the author of that minutely curious and interesting work, 'The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians'—determined to leave the pleasing vicinity of Kensington, to accompany her brother to the crowded, hot, and uncomfortable city to which the natives give the grandiloquent name of Al-Kahirah, 'The Victorious.'

After a short voyage, the fair traveller and her family arrived at Alexandria, and proceeding through the canal of Mahmoodiyeh, thence into the Nile, were speedily steamed up that renowned river to Bulac, the port of, and two miles distant from, Cairo. The sole means of conveyance for this short journey is on the back of an ass; and it was thus that Mrs Poole made her entrance into Cairo. This mode of conveyance, which is thought somewhat disrespectfully of in England, is by no means so derogatory in Egypt; the donkey of that country being as far superior to other donkeys as the Arabian charger is to the Suffolk punch. 'The ass of Cairo,' says the lively author of *Scenes and Impressions in Egypt*, 'even the hired ass, is a lineal descendant of the *Sprightly* of the Arabian Nights; a fine-sized animal with a parti-coloured pack-saddle, having a high pomel covered with red leather, on which you may lounge, lean your hand, or suffer your hands to lie. He is provided with stirrups and

* The mummies in the Egyptian room of the British Museum are inscribed with hieroglyphics, which—translated in the catalogue—give the minute particulars above adverted to.

* Being *Letters from Cairo during 1843-4*, with E. W. Lane, Esq., author of the *Modern Egyptians*; by his sister (Mrs Poole). In two volumes. Charles Knight and Co.

bridle, half European.' These animals are such favourites, that upwards of forty thousand of them were said to have been in use in Grand Cairo alone.

Mrs Poole's first impressions of the city are thus described:—It has the appearance of having been deserted for perhaps a century, and suddenly re-peopled by persons who had been unable, from poverty or some other cause, to repair it, and clear away its antiquated cobwebs. I never saw such cobwebs as hung in many apertures, in gloomy dark festoons, leading me to consider the unmolested condition of their tenants. I wish I could say that I do not fear these creatures; but surely in the insect world there is nothing so savage-looking as a black thick-legged spider. After passing through several of the streets, into which it appeared as though the dwellings had turned out nearly all their inhabitants, we arrived at an agreeable house, situated in the midst of gardens, in which we are to take up our temporary abode. Graceful palm-trees, loaded with their fruit, meet our eyes in every direction, while acacias, bananas, orange and lemon trees, pomegranate trees, and vines, form a splendid variety; and but for one essential drawback, the coup-d'œil would be charming; this drawback is the want of refreshing showers. The foliage on which we look is perfectly covered with dust, and the soil of the gardens is watered by a wheel worked by a patient bullock, who pursues his round about with little intermission, and thrives in his persevering labour. The plan of the gardens is very curious; they are divided by long parallel walks, with gutters on either side, and subdivided into little square compartments, each about two yards wide, by ridges of earth about half a foot high, and the water is admitted into these squares one after another. When I looked upon the little ditches and squares of water, remaining for some time without absorption, I could not but remember our bright pretty gardens in England, and how carefully, in watering our flowers, we avoided saturating the mould, both because it would be injurious to them, and displeasing to the eye; and these recollections almost brought me to the conclusion, that a garden in Egypt is not worth the trouble of cultivation. So much for national prejudice and love of home scenes.'

The writer's first necessity was of course to procure a house, and, after having searched for a month without success, she at length succeeded in finding one to her mind, which she thus describes:—'On the ground-floor is a court, open to the sky, round which the apartments extend, gallery above gallery. Round the court are five rooms; one large room (a mandarah), intended for the reception of male guests, with a fountain in the centre; a winter room; a small sleeping-room for any male guest; a kitchen and a coffee-room for servants. On the right hand, immediately on entering the street-door, is the door of the harem, or the entrance to the stairs leading to the ladies' apartments; the whole of the house, excepting the apartments of the ground-floor, being considered as the "harem." On the first floor is a marble-paved chamber, with a roof open towards the north, and sloping upwards, conveying into the chamber generally a delightful breeze. There are also five other rooms on the first floor; and in each of the two principal apartments, the greater portion of the floor, forming about three-fourths, is raised from five to six inches, the depressed portion being paved with marble. The reason for thus laying the floors is, that the outer slippers are left on the depressed portion, and the raised part, which is matted, is not to be defiled with anything which is unclean. The feet are covered, in addition to the stockings, with a kind of inner slippers, the soles of which, as well as the upper leathers, are of yellow morocco; they are called *mezz*; and the outer slippers, which are without heels, are styled *baboog*. The latter, by the way, I am often losing, and I fear I shall continue to do so, for I despair of learning to shuffle like the ladies of the country. When wearing the riding or walking dress, the *mezz* are exchanged for a pair of high morocco socks, and the *baboog* are worn as usual. They are

always pale yellow. The walls throughout are white-washed, and the ceilings composed of fancifully-carved woodwork, in some instances extremely tastefully arranged. Besides the rooms I have mentioned, there are three small marble-paved apartments, forming, *en suite*, an antechamber, a reclining chamber, and a bath. We little thought, when we congratulated ourselves on this luxury, that it would become the most abominable part of the house. Above are four rooms, the principal one opening to a delightful terrace, which is considerably above most of the surrounding houses; and on this we enjoy our breakfast and supper under the clearest sky in the world; but we always remember that the sweet air which comforts us in the mornings and evenings of our sultry days blows from the direction of our own dear country; and the thought renders it the more welcome.' This description applies to all the better sort of houses in Cairo. The rent paid for this mansion was only L.12 per year. Indeed, on turning to Mr Lane's minute work on the Modern Egyptians, we perceive, from an account of household expenses in the appendix, that living is remarkably cheap in Egypt. It appears that a man may live like a gentleman for some L.26 (2600 piastres) per annum, exclusive of house rent and servants.

After Mrs Poole had resided in the city some time, she made several acquaintances amongst the Caireen ladies, and in her visits to them obtained a more minute insight into the economy and manners of an eastern harem than has, to our knowledge, been ever yet furnished. One of her visits to the household of a person of rank we quote in an abridged form:—'When we arrived at the house of Habeeb Efendee, and had passed the outer entrance, I found that the harem apartments, as in other houses of the great in this country, are not confined to the first and upper floors, but form a separate and complete house, distinct from that of the men. Having passed a spacious hall, paved with marble, we were met at the door of the first apartment by the elder daughter of Habeeb Efendee, who gave me the usual eastern salutation, touching her lips and forehead with her right hand, and then insisted on removing my riding-dress herself, although surrounded by slaves. This was a mark of extraordinary condescension, as you will presently see. In the houses of the middle classes, the ladies generally honour their visitors by disrobing them of their riding-dress; but in the high harems this office is generally performed by slaves; and only by a member of the family when a guest is especially distinguished. When the lady I have mentioned had removed my surcoat apparel, a slave in attendance received them in an exquisite pink kerchief of cashmere, richly embroidered with gold. The kerchiefs of this kind, in the harems of the wealthy, are generally very elegant, but that was the most perfect specimen I have seen of correct and tasteful embroidery. The riding-dress was immediately taken into another room, according to a common custom, which is observed for the purpose of creating a short delay, giving an opportunity to offer some additional refreshment when the guest has proposed to take her leave. My new acquaintance then conducted me to the divan, and placed me next to the seat of honour, which was reserved for her mother, the first cousin of the late Sultan Mahmoud, who soon entered the room, and gave me a cordial welcome, assigning to me the most distinguished seat on her right hand, the same to which her daughter had conducted me, while the grandmother of Abbas Pasha sat on her left. She was soon followed by her second daughter, who greeted me with much politeness, and in a very elegant manner assured me that I was welcome. A number of white slaves formed a large semicircle before us, and received from others, who waited in the antechamber, silver trays, containing glass dishes of sweetmeats. There were three spoons in each dish, and two pieces of sweetmeat in each spoon. These were immediately succeeded by coffee, which was also brought on silver trays; the small china cups being, as usual, in

stands shaped like egg-cups; but these were not, as in ordinary houses, simply of silver filigree, or plain, but decorated with diamonds. They were certainly elegant, but more costly than beautiful. The coffee is never handed on the tray, but gracefully presented by the attendant, holding the little stand between the thumb and finger of the right hand. After these refreshments a short time elapsed, when two slaves brought in sherbet on silver waiters, in exceedingly elegant cut-glass cups, with saucers and covers. Each tray was covered with a round pink richly-embroidered cover, which the slave removed as she approached us. To receive our cups, of the contents of which, according to custom, we drank about two-thirds, another slave approached, with a large white embroidered kerchief, ostensibly for the purpose of wiping the mouth; but any lady would be thought quite a novice who did more than touch it with her lips. In the course of conversation I expressed my admiration of the Turkish language; and, to my surprise, the elder of the young ladies gave me a general invitation, and proposed to become my instructress. I thanked her for her very polite offer, but made no promise that I would become her pupil; foreseeing that it would lead to a very considerable waste of time. In all the harems I have visited, Arabic is understood and spoken; so I do not expect any advantage from a knowledge of Turkish, unless I could devote to its study considerable attention.

'The perfect good humour and cheerfulness which pervaded this family circle is well worthy of remark, and much engaged my thoughts during the morning of my visit. All that I observed of the manners of the eastern women at Habeeb Efendee's and elsewhere, leads me to consider the perfect contrast which the customs of eastern life present to the whole construction of European society.

'Before our departure, it was proposed that I should see their house; and the elder daughter threw her arm round my neck, and thus led me through a magnificent room which was surrounded by divans; the elevated portion of the floor was covered with India matting; and in the middle of the depressed portion was the most tasteful fountain I have seen in Egypt, exquisitely inlaid with black, red, and white marble. The ceiling was a beautiful specimen of highly-wrought arabesque work, and the walls, as usual, whitewashed, and perfectly plain, with the exception of the lower portions, which, to the height of about six feet, were cased with Dutch tiles. I was conducted up stairs in the same manner, and I could not help feeling exceedingly amused at my situation; and considering that these ladies are of the royal family of Turkey, you will see that I was most remarkably honoured. When we approached the bath, we entered the reclining-room, which was furnished with divans, and presented a most comfortable appearance; but the heat and vapour were so extremely oppressive in the region of the bath, that we merely looked into it, and gladly returned to the cool gallery. I am not surprised that you are curious on the subject of the bath, and the eastern manner of using it; and I hope to devote a future letter to a description of the operation (for such indeed it may be styled), and the place in which that operation is performed. On our reaching the stairs, the second daughter of Habeeb Efendee took her sister's place; and with her arm round my neck, we descended the stairs, and re-entered the room where I had received so kind a reception. When we rose to take our leave, the elder daughter received my riding-dress from a slave, and was about to attire me, when her sister said, "You took them off; it is for me to put them on." The elder lady partly consented, retaining the habarah, and thus they dressed me together. Then, after giving me the usual salutation, they each cordially pressed my hand, and kissed my cheek. We then descended into the court, attended by the ladies and a crowd of white slaves. Having crossed the court, we arrived at the great gate, through which I had before passed, which was only closed by a large mat suspended

before it, forming the curtain of the harem. This mat was raised by black eunuchs, who poured from a passage without, and immediately after the ladies bade us farewell, and returned, followed by their slaves. The principal eunuch ascended first the mounting platform, and placed me on the donkey, while two others arranged my feet in the stirrups; our own servants being kept in the background. A few days after this visit I received a second invitation from this harem, with the polite assurance that they intended making a festival and fantasia for my amusement.'

Mrs Poole gives in her second volume a minute account of her visit to the apartments of the wives of no less a person than Mohammed Ali, the great pasha. Assuredly this is a curious subject for contemplation. Here we have an English lady paying morning visits to a Turkish harem, in which she is received on the most liberal and friendly footing. This is a simple fact to be regarded as a sign of the times by no means unimportant. It augurs the beginning of a friendly intercourse between the most distant nations, and a charitable toleration of opposite prejudices, which will in time produce the most beneficial results in every quarter of the globe where the same degree of intercommunion has been established.

We must not take leave of Mrs Poole without recommending her interesting work to general perusal. It is full of interesting facts, well and simply told.

SKETCHES IN NATURAL HISTORY.

THE CACTUS FAMILY.

'THE monster cactus at Kew,' which has been the vegetable wonder of the newspapers for the last three months, has sent us a rambling—not exactly among the hills and ravines of tropical America with tin-case and root-hook—but amid histories, systems, and monographs, to glean something respecting the nature of this most curious and interesting family.

The majority of our readers must have some idea of the outward characters of the cacti; for they are now extensively cultivated in conservatories and on domestic flower-stands, either for the beauty of their evanescent blossoms, or for the singularity of their structures. To those who are not familiar with the physiognomy of the tribe, we would say—Go to the nearest botanic garden or private hothouse, and study for half an hour the aspect of the melon-cactus, with its globular spiny stem and woolly crest; of the old-man cactus, with its round oblong stalk so profusely covered with long white hairs, and so like the silvered head of age; of the opuntia, with its spiny tongue-shaped stems and branches springing from each other, and jointed together in more than Siamese brotherhood; of the creeping cereus, with its whip-like stems hanging down from the pot in which it is generally suspended—do this, and we guarantee the fixture in your mind's eye of an image not readily to be effaced, with the conviction at the same time that the cacti constitute one of the most singular and interesting orders of the vegetable kingdom. They are unique in their forms and habits, and meet with but very distant allies in any other of the fleshy-leaved orders. The aloë, house-leek, and pineapple tribes, are also characterised by thick fleshy members; but in them these members are true leaves, performing the regular functions of that organ. The little yellow flower of the house-leek is elevated on its own independent stem; and the flower-stalk of the Agavè Americana rises from fifteen to thirty feet above the leaves which give it birth. Not so with the cacti: their leaves are either so rudimentary that they are scarcely discernible, or fall off from the young shoots almost as soon as they expand; their place being supplied by spines either solitary or in the form of star-like tufts and bunches. As plants, they are all stem and branch, appearing above ground as spiny tubercles; as globular masses, branching tongue-shaped bodies,

creeping snake-like stems dangling from the arid rock, angular zig-zag stalks of considerable height, as leaf upon leaf, or in other forms the most irregular and grotesque. Nor is this form stationary in the same individual; for as the stem consists chiefly of cellular tissue, with little woody fibre, it is peculiarly liable to sudden expansions and developments, so that however angular or compressed the branches of a plant may originally have been, the trunks become in time either perfectly cylindrical or with scarcely any visible angles. The flowers, which are white, scarlet, or purple, and often showy and attractive, spring in some species from the woolly crests of the stems, in some from the tufts of spines, and in others from the angular edges and clefts, as if the order was endowed with a reproductive power at every point of the surface. The fruit, like the flower, adheres to the stem, and might be taken for one of the fleshy lobes, were it not for its scarlet or purple colour; so concentrated and huddled together in this family are the stem, branches, leaves, flower, and fruit—organs which in most tribes are separate and well-defined. So much for the general characteristics of the cactaceæ; let us now glance at their distribution and habits, at their individual peculiarities, and economical uses.

All the species of cacti are said to be natives of tropical America; only a few having escaped to the southern states of North America, and to the highlands of Chili and Mendoza. This is rather a circumscribed range; for although the opuntias which cover the volcanic soil of Sicily may be justly regarded as exotics, we can scarcely consider the opuntias, rhipsales, and other cactaceous plants which are found in Central and Southern Africa as other than true natives. Be this as it may, the cacti grow chiefly on hot dry rocks or plains, where the commoner forms of vegetation could not exist, and may be considered as one of the means which nature has provided for the support of animals in regions where neither food nor water can be procured—their stems being filled with an abundant insipid wholesome juice, and their fruit being succulent, and of an agreeable acidulous flavour. To enable them to endure the excessive drought to which they are exposed, they are furnished with an unusually tough leathery skin, which has few, if any, evaporating pores. This envelope prevents the escape of what moisture their long penetrating roots may collect from the soil; and thus during the hottest season they are turgid with juice, while during the rainy season their turgidity breaks forth into new branches, buds, and flowers. No adaptation, indeed, could be more perfect than that of the cactus to the soil and seasonal influences of its native habitat. During the brief period of rain, it puts forth its shoots and blossoms with astonishing rapidity, the flowers of some species, as the *Cereus grandiflorus*, actually opening during night, and fading before the morning. On the return of the drought, the plant concentrates its vital energies, and becomes dormant; its pores are closed, and its skin toughens and thickens, to protect the nutritive juices from waste or injury. And here the cultivator of exotics may learn a useful lesson: were he to attempt to force such plants as the cactaceæ into a perpetual growth, he would speedily impair or exhaust their vitality; but by imitating the conditions under which they naturally grow—by keeping away the stimulant of combined heat and moisture, and by allowing them a season of dormancy and rest, he may preserve them in perfect health for generations.

Plants thus rooting themselves among fissured rocks and on arid shingle, or suspending their whip-like stems from the clefts of decayed trunks, may readily be supposed to be endowed with various means of reproduction, since the chances of soil and moisture are against them. Such, indeed, is the case. The cacti are propagated not only by their seed, but with amazing facility by their buds and branches. Take, for example, the branch or joint of an opuntia, dry it a little, place it in a hot damp place, no matter how scanty the soil, and it strikes root immediately. A jointed plant thus broken

asunder by the tread of a foot or the fall of a branch, is actually increased by the very accident which would be certain destruction to plants of a different order. Nay, each tuft of spines is a bud, and if the top of the plant be cut down or injured, every tuft swells and becomes a bud; every bud a branch, which, when detached, will strike root, and spring up into a new individual. Many hundreds, and even thousands of tufts, have been counted on a single gigantic cactus; so that, with a power of increase so enormous, we can readily account for the frequency and distribution of the order among the rocks and plains of Central America, notwithstanding the numerous severities of soil and climate to which they are subjected. Naturalists have descanted on the uses of the mosses and lichens in clothing the naked rock with soil; the cacti are also not without their importance in this respect, though operating in a somewhat different manner. De Candolle, in speaking of the opuntia, remarks, that it is employed to good purpose in fertilising the old lavas at the foot of Mount *Ætna*. 'As soon as a fissure is perceived, a branch or joint of an opuntia is stuck in; the latter pushes out roots, which are nourished by the rain that collects round them, or by whatever dust or remains of organic matter may have collected into a soil; these roots once developed, insinuate themselves into the most minute crevices, expand, and finally break up the lava into mere fragments. These fragments suffer further decomposition by exposure to the atmosphere and human culture, and so in time constitute the basis of a fertile soil.'

Regarding the peculiarities of the respective genera, little need be said, as these depend rather upon difference of form than on any essential distinction of habit or property. The order is usually divided by botanists into two sections—*Opuntiaceæ* and *Rhipsalidæ*—on account of a minute difference in the manner in which the seed is arranged within the fruit. That this distinction is unimportant in a general point of view, may be learned from the fact, that the first section comprehends all the genera save one—the solitary *Rhipsalis*, on which the second section is founded. The described genera are—*Cactus*, *Melocactus*, *Opuntia*, *Cereus*, *Mamillaria*, *Echinocactus*, *Epiphyllum*, and *Pereskia*, of which we may particularise the following:—The *mamillaria*, so called from the pap-like tubercles which cover its sub-cylindrical stem, is a common form in our conservatories. Each tubercle is covered with a little tuft of radiating spines, and the flowers which sit close to the stem are ranged in a kind of zone round the plant, giving it rather an elegant appearance. The *melon-cactus*, or Turk's cap, one of the most singularly formed, has a globose melon-shaped stem, covered with alternate furrows and ridges, the latter being armed with spiny tufts, which effectually guard the succulent parts from the depredations of animals. The stem is crowned by a woolly tuft—the tassel of the fancied cap—which bears the flowers and fruit. This genus delights in the most arid plains of America, and is often the only vegetable that gladdens the waste. It is found of all ages, and from the size of a hand-ball to that of the largest bomb. The wild horses are said to seek its refreshing juice when every vestige of external moisture has failed, striking asunder its succulent trunk with repeated blows of the forefoot—an operation which, from the dangerous nature of its spines, requires considerable address. The *echinocactus*, or hedgehog thistle, has also a globose stem, but wants the woolly head, and has its flowers springing from the tufts of spines which arm its ridges. It is to this genus that the 'monster at Kew' belongs, of whose history and dimensions we learn the following particulars from a recent number of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*:—

The gigantic cacti in the royal gardens—for it seems there are two—are the gift of Frederick Staines, Esq., of San Luis, Potosi, in compliment to whom one of them has been named *Echinocactus Stainesii*; and the other *E. Viznaga*, from a native word signifying twice pointed, in allusion to the character of its prickles. The

former was received towards the end of 1844, and the latter, which has been designated 'the monster,' par excellence, so recently as February 1845. Mr Staines made the discovery of this Titan in 1843, and thus announced his intention of sending him to England. 'I mean to have him deposited in a strong box, sending the box first to the mountain where the monster grows, and placing it on the springs of a carriage, which I shall despatch for that purpose, and so forward it to Vera Cruz. My monster friend cannot travel any other way, from his stupendous size and immense ponderosity, which cannot be accurately calculated here, where the largest machine for conveying weights does not pass 400 pounds. This enormous plant will require twenty men at least to place it upon the vehicle, with the aid of such levers as our Indians can invent upon the occasion. Should this huge specimen reach Kew, what must be your admiration on seeing it, when you express such delight on receiving the former one. The viznaga grows in the deep ravines of our loftiest mountains, amongst huge stones: the finest plants are inaccessible to wheeled vehicles, and even on horseback it is difficult to reach them. Still, I shall use my utmost endeavours to get a large one, and shall cause the palm-mats to be sewed most carefully round his huge and thorny circumference, before applying to his roots the crowbars destined to wrench him from his resting-place of unknown centuries. He will have to travel 300 leagues; and happy shall I be if I hear that the carriage has not broken down between this city and Mexico, through which capital he must pass on his way to Vera Cruz. These monsters are of a dark green colour, with formidable black spines, 3 inches long.' After various trials and difficulties—the breaking down of the carriage, and the impossibility of getting a proper box constructed for his reception—the cactus was brought down to Vera Cruz, packed as a bale, and shipped for England. 'It was on Saturday, February 15, 1845, that the viznaga, together with five large boxes filled with other individuals of the same tribe, and rarities of different kinds, reached the Botanic Gardens in a condition of security and vigour which were quite remarkable, considering their bulk and weight, the vast overland journey, mainly performed through a country of high mountains and perilous roads, and their arrival in our island during one of the severest frosts that had been experienced for many winters. This degree of safety can only be attributed to the extreme care that had been bestowed upon the packing, and the materials with which the specimens were surrounded. The large cactus was first surrounded with a dense clothing of the Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*), and well corded. Fifteen mats, each as large and as thick as an ordinary door-mat, and composed of the fibres of a palm sewn together, formed the exterior envelope. Freed from these incumbrances, the monster viznaga was seen as perfect, as green, and as uninjured, as if it had been that morning removed from its native rocks, the very long flagelliform roots arranged in coils like the cable of a ship. Ten of our strongest men with difficulty placed it in scales, to ascertain its precise weight; and afterwards, with still greater difficulty, transferred it perfectly unharmed to a tub prepared with suitable soil. The net weight was 713 pounds; height from the surface of the earth, 44 feet; measured over the top from the ground, on each side, 10½ feet; circumference at one foot from the ground, 8 feet 7 inches; number of ridges or costae, 44; each ridge had 50 tufts of spines; and as in each tuft there are four spines, the total number must be 8800—no insignificant armature, when we remember that each spine is not less than 3 inches long. Compared with the ordinary growth of the globular cacti, the viznaga is a Titan indeed; the dimensions of the majority varying within the limits we have already mentioned.

Following out our detail, the next in order is the *Pilocereus*, or old-man cactus, so called from its resemblance, when of small size, to an old man's head, being covered

with long white hairs, which hang down like hoary locks. In our hothouses it is generally of small size; but in its native country it is said to attain the height of 12 or 15 feet, thereby losing its likeness to the object from which it has received its most familiar name. The Peruvian torch thistles (*Cereus Peruvianus* and *hexagonus*) are still more gigantic plants, often attaining a height of 40 feet, though their stems be not much thicker than a man's arm. The creeping cereus (*C. flagelliformis*) is well known from its long snake-like stems, which hang down from the sides of the suspended pots in which it is usually grown; and the night-flowering cereus (*C. grandiflorus*), the blossoms of which open during night, and fade before morning, has been long an object of attraction. It has an angular, branched, and clambering stem, which throws out roots at every joint, and has a magnificent flower; the rays of the calyx of a bright yellow when open, and the petals of the most delicate white. The flower-bud begins to open at seven or eight o'clock in the evening, is fully blown by eleven, and by three or four in the morning is faded and withered. The *Opuntias*, which are numerous and useful, are distinguished by their oblong, flat, leaf-like branches, united together by joints, and for the most part covered by spines. In Europe, the height they attain is insignificant; but in warmer regions they sometimes rise to 10 or 15 feet above the arid soil that supports them. In South Africa, Mr Backhouse saw an *opuntia* 10 feet high, with numerous branches, and covered with splendid yellow blossoms. Compared with the genera of the first section, the *Rhipsalis* is an insignificant plant, having a slender-jointed stem, not unlike the common rock samphire.

The economical value of the cactaceæ is not the least important feature in their history. Many of the species yield an esculent fruit, which partakes of that acidulous flavour so much esteemed in the gooseberry and currant family. The pulpy berry of the *Opuntia tuna*, which resembles in shape and size the fig of Europe, has gained for it the name of 'Indian fig'—a term by which the whole family is sometimes designated. This fruit forms a very refreshing repast in Spanish America and the West Indies; and that gathered from the common *opuntia* of *Ætna* is sold for a similar purpose in all the towns of Sicily. The fruit of the different species is known by such names as Indian fig, prickly pear, strawberry pear, &c.—the latter being the produce of a cereus, and the most highly-prized for its flavour and cooling properties. In Brazil, the *opuntias* are much planted round houses, as a fence which neither man nor animals can easily break through—a use to which we believe they are also applied in the south of Europe. When the island of St Christopher (St Kitts) was to be divided between the British and French, three rows of the *O. tuna* were planted by common consent to form the boundary. The chief importance of the cacti and *opuntias*, however, consists in their being the natural food of the cochineal insect—*coccus cacti*—so valuable in the arts. This insect, which is not unlike the meal-bug of our gardens, has the substance of the body coloured of a rich scarlet throughout; the richness of the dye depending upon the nature of the plant on which it feeds. The species in greatest repute is the *Opuntia coccifera*, or spineless cochineal fig, of which there are extensive plantations in Mexico and the West Indies, for the purpose of preparing cochineal. The male insect is winged; the female alone is used as a dye. There are two kinds of cochineal, which are reputed to feed on different species of cacti. One of these, the wild or common cochineal, is covered with a silky envelope, and is not so valuable as the cultivated sort, which has a powdery or mealy covering. The female insects, after feeding on the cacti for three or four months, are brushed off by means of a squirrel's tail, and are then killed by exposure either to the sun or to the vapour of hot water. When dried, they are exported in large quantities; and the colouring matter is easily extracted by water and alcohol, or hartshorn. It is

stated that 800,000 pounds of cochineal are annually brought to Europe; each pound containing about 70,000 insects. The annual consumption in Great Britain alone is estimated at upwards of 150,000 pounds; about £300,000 sterling. So valuable to man is an insect which ignorance would be apt to regard as mean and insignificant.

It is a curious consideration that two such important substances as silk and cochineal—the one adding beauty to the other's utility—should be the produce of small and apparently insignificant insects. The silkworm obtains its food from the mulberry; the cochineal insect feeds on the cactus. The *materiel* of silk and cochineal must exist in the vegetable structure; yet man, with all his boasted skill in chemical science, can neither imitate the fibre of the one nor the dye of the other. The animal chemistry of the tiny insect outstrips the most ambitious effort of the laboratory, as far as the works of nature will ever surpass the efforts of human art. The insect, however—and here lies the consoling distinction—in producing its finest fabric, merely obeys a law of nature which it cannot avoid; with man, every product is the result of intellectual skill and responsible reason.

From the preceding sketch, the reader may form some idea of this singular order of vegetation, and be enabled more fully to appreciate the merits of the giant viznaga at Kew. To gaze at an object without some knowledge of its relations, properties, and uses, is mere senseless wonderment: we can only admire where we are sufficiently informed.

WRITING HISTORY FOR THE PEOPLE.

We have not for a long time met anything more entirely accordant with our own views upon a speculative subject, than certain remarks which the *Athenæum* quotes in a late number from a brief essay of M. de Lamartine, *On the Manner of Writing History for the People*. With thanks to our periodical brother for bringing these remarks under our attention, we transfer them entire to our own columns. Let our readers of every rank deeply ponder upon them.

"I have often said to myself what you say with so much good sense to your readers in the introduction to your useful book, 'After having equalised rights, we must equalise as nearly as possible intellects. The task of our times is to raise the masses to the conditions of civilisation; of that relative leisure and ease which may permit them to instruct themselves. A popular encyclopædia would be a peaceful revolution.' * * But in what spirit will you and your friends write a history for the use of the people? Popular writers have hitherto grossly flattered the people—a proof that they had no great esteem for them; for we flatter only those whom we seek to seduce. Why were they flattered? Because they were made an instrument, and not an end. Such writers said to themselves, The force is there: we want it to upset governments which constrain us, or to absorb countries which we covet: let us invite the people; let us intoxicate them with their own praises; let us tell them that right resides with numbers, that their will is justice, that God is on the side of great armies, that all means are good to secure the success of the popular cause, and that even crime is effaced by the grandeur and the sanctity of results. They will believe us, follow us, and lend us the physical force we need; and when, by the aid of their arms, their blood, and even their crimes, we shall have overthrown a despotism, and convulsed Europe, we will dismiss them, and tell them in our turn, Be silent, work, and obey. This is the way in which they have hitherto been addressed; thus have the vices of courts been transported into the streets, and the people been inoculated with such a love of adulation, and such a craving for obsequiousness and caresses, that, like certain sovereigns of the Lower Empire, they would only be spoken to kneeling.

This is not the course to be pursued. We must speak to them erect, on a level, face to face. The people are neither better nor worse than the other elements of the nation; numbers are nothing. Take each of the individuals who compose a crowd, one by one, and what do you

find? The same ignorances, the same errors, the same passions, often the same vices, as elsewhere. Are these men before whom to kneel? No. Multiply all these ignorances, vices, passions, miserable weaknesses, by as many millions as you will, you will not change their nature. Let us leave talking of numbers, and respect only truth.

In writing history for the people, you must consider truth alone. And do not think that you will be less listened to, or less popular on that account: the people have indeed acquired a depraved taste for adulation and falsehood; but their natural tastes are for truth and courage. They respect those who dare to brave them, and despise those who fear them.

This being the case, what point of view will you select for writing your people's history? There are three principal views which you may take—that of glory, that of patriotism, and that of civilisation, or of the morality of the acts you are about to relate. If you consider an act under the aspect of glory, you will delight a warlike nation, which has been dazzled long before it has been enlightened, and which this false glitter has so often blinded as to the true value of the men and things which appeared in its horizon. If you place yourself in the exclusive point of view of its patriotism, you will excite all the enthusiasm of a people which pleads the excuse of its safety and its greatness for its lofty egotism, and which, in the feeling of its greatness and its strength, has sometimes forgotten that it was not alone in Europe. But neither of these points of view will give you the real truth—that is, the general truth; they will give you only the French truth. But French truth is true only at Paris; cross the frontier, and it is a lie. It is not this truth, circumscribed within the limits of a nation, that you wish to inculcate; it is not to this that you would bring down the intelligence of the people. What, then, remains? The universal and permanent point of view; that is to say, the point of view of the morality of the actions of the individuals or of the nations which you have to describe. All other aspects of the subject are enlightened by false or partial gleams: this alone stands in the full and divine light of day; this alone can guide the infirmity of human judgments through the labyrinth of personal or national prejudices, opinions, passions, interests, and enable a people to say—this is right; this is wrong; this is great or noble. In a word, if you wish to form the judgment of the masses, to rescue them from the immoral doctrine of success, do what has never been done yet—*give a conscience to history*. This is the work demanded for our age, and worthy of our people. By treating history thus, you will perhaps have less immediate popularity; you will not strike the passionate imagination of the masses; but you will render a thousand times better service to their cause, their interests, and their reason.

To give an example: one of the great events of the age—one of those days which divide for a length of time the fate of a revolution, of a nation, or of an empire—was the 18th Brumaire. You would doubtless have to relate it: how would you contemplate it? Should it be under the aspect of glory? That is dazzling; it glitters like a drawn sword in the sun; it whirls like the dust raised by a squadron of horse galloping by, filling the ear with noise and the eye with *éclat*. Here is a man coming from distant camps, preceded by his name, strong in his renown, accustomed to military discipline, weary of the tardiness, the resistance, and the inconvenient noise of a government of discussion; who, impatient of the slow and collective work of establishing liberty, takes advantage of a momentary discouragement of the public mind, mounts his horse at the head of a few grenadiers, breaks all this republican machine with his sword, and says, "Give me the empire; you can only talk, I will act." He succeeds; the revolution falls into his hands; he transforms it at his will: incapable of constituting the disordered elements into a nation, he forms them into an army, launches it against the world, intoxicates it with victories, and seizes the crown it tenders him. This is very fine. Make this glitter in the eyes of the masses—they will be dazzled by it: will you have instructed them?

Or will you contemplate the same event in the patriotic point of view? It is the universal monarchy of the French flag; the people sees itself everywhere under the image of its victorious armies; French patriotism appears vast as the continent of Europe, and exclaims, "L'Europe c'est moi;" it defies itself. By presenting the fact thus, you will excite the people to enthusiasm for an event which has robbed them of all the fruits of the revolution before

they were ripe, and of all the moral conquests of the eighteenth century. Will you have elevated their character?

Lastly, will you view this same event under the aspect of the morality of the act and of its influence on true civilisation? It completely changes. There is a man to whom the free government of his country has intrusted an army for its defence against factions, and who converts that army into a military faction against that government. Here is an anarchical and bloody revolution, which by the sheer force of the public mind, and the spontaneous course of civil reactions, had traversed the most deplorable crises, and washed its hands with shame of the blood odiously shed; and whose violent oscillations daily became more temperate, and showed a tendency to confine themselves within the limits of a vital but regular motion. This man comes and stops the revolutionary movement exactly at the point where it ceased to be convulsive, and began to be creative. He arms himself with all the repentances, the resentments, the apostacies, which a revolution always leaves in its train; he reconstitutes an *ancien régime* with names and things of yesterday; he imposes a censorship on the press, and silence on the tribune; creates a nobility of plebeians, and converts religion into a tool of government. He stifles throughout Europe all sympathy with French ideas, under the hatred inspired by violence and conquest. What is the result of this drama with one actor? You see. A name the more in history; but France twice invaded, and her boundaries narrowed from without and from within—reason, liberty, and the improvement of the masses indefinitely retarded by this episode of glory, and condemned, perhaps, to pass a century in recovering what it lost in a day. Such is the 18th Brumaire under its three aspects. Need I tell you which is mine?

You may treat every incident of the French Revolution in the same manner: you will, in every case, find these three aspects: the purely individual—glory; the exclusively national—patriotism; and the moral—civilisation. And if you follow out the consequences logically, you will invariably arrive at this result, that glory and patriotism, severed from general morality, are sterile for a particular nation as well as for humanity at large.

To teach the people by facts, by events, by the hidden meaning of those great historic dramas of which men see only the scenes and the actors, but whose plot is contrived by an invisible hand; to teach them to know, to judge, to moderate themselves; to make them capable of distinguishing those who serve from those who mislead them, those who dazzle from those who enlighten; to point to every great man or great event of their own history, and say, Weigh them yourselves, not with the false weights of your passions of a day—your prejudices, your anger, your national vanity, your narrow patriotism—but with the just weights of the universal conscience of the human race, and the utility of the act to the cause of civilisation; to convince them that every nation has its post, its part assigned to it, every class of society its relative importance in the sight of God; to teach the people hence to respect themselves, and to participate religiously, and with full consciousness of what they are doing, in the progressive accomplishment of the great designs of Providence; in a word, to create in them a moral sense, and to exercise that moral sense on great events and men of their history, and on themselves; I venture to say that this were to give the people much more than empire, power, or government: it were to give them conscience; the judgment and the sovereignty of themselves: it were to place them above all governments; for, indeed, the very day on which they are fit to reign, they will reign—it signifies little under what form or what name. It is the people that must be modified; governments will modify themselves after its image; for be assured, as is the people, so is the government; and when a people complains of its own, it is because it is unworthy to have another. This was the opinion of Tacitus in his days, and it is equally true in our own.

OATMEAL MORE NUTRITIOUS THAN WHEAT.

The following playful comparison between the relative alimentary powers of oatmeal and wheat flour, is copied from a useful article on Practical Agriculture in Blackwood's Magazine for March:—Professor Johnston, in the recent edition of his Elements of Agricultural Chemistry and Geology, tells us that, from experiments made in the

laboratory of the Agricultural Chemistry Association of Scotland, it turns out that oats are far richer in muscular matter, fat, and starch, than the best wheat flour grown in any part of England—that they contain eighteen or twenty per cent. of that which forms muscle, five to eight of fat, and sixty-five of starch. The account, therefore, between shelled oats (groats) and fine wheaten flour stands thus. One hundred pounds of each contain—

	Wheat.	Oats.
Muscular matter,	10 lbs.	18 lbs.
Fat,	3 . . .	6 . . .
Starch,	50 . . .	65 . . .
	63 lbs.	89 lbs.

What do you say to these numbers, Mr Cockney? You wont pity us, Scotch oatmeal-eaters, any more, we guess. Experience and science are both on our side. What makes your race-horses the best in the world, may be expected to make our peasantry the best too. We offer you, therefore, a fair bet. You shall take ten English ploughmen, and feed them upon two pounds and a half of wheaten flour a-day, and we shall take as many Scotch ploughmen, and feed them upon the same weight of oatmeal a-day—if they can eat so much, for that is doubtful—and we shall back our men against yours for any sum you like. They shall walk, run, work—or fight you, if you like it—and they shall thrash you to your heart's content. We should like to convince you that Scotch parritch has some real solid metal in it. We back the oatcake and the porridge against all the wheaten messes in the world. We defy your home-made bread, your bakers' bread, your household bread, your leaven bread, and your brown Georges—your fairy bread and your raisin bread—your baps, rolls, scones, muffins, crumpets, and cookies—your bricks, biscuits, cakes, and rusks—your Bath buns and your Sally Luns—your tea-cakes, and saffron-cakes, and slim-cakes, and plank-cakes, and pan-cakes, and soda-cakes, and currant-cakes, and sponge-cakes, and seed-cakes, and girdle-cakes, and singing-himies—your shortbread and your currant-buns—and if there be any other names by which you designate your wheaten abominations, we defy and detest them all. We swear by the oatcake and the porridge, the substantial bannock and the brose—long may Scotland produce them, and Scotchmen live and fight upon them!

PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE.

He that enlarges his curiosity after the works of nature, demonstrably multiplies the inlets to happiness; therefore we should cherish ardour in the pursuit of useful knowledge, and remember that a blighted spring makes a barren year, and that the vernal flowers, however beautiful and gay, are only intended by nature as preparatives to autumnal fruits.—Johnson.

SONNET.

BY S. W. PARTRIDGE.

Urging with queenly grace her upward way
Through the blue lonely sky, night's mateless queen
Lights up the landscape with her silver sheen,
And gladdens all around with softened ray.
On the cold pearly ground the shadows play;
The dusky trees in gloomy grandeur loam
O'er the gray moveless stream in sleep serene;
And all things dream the silent hours away.
Vision of beauty, my poor senses reel,
Intoxicated with thy witchery:
My heart o'erbrims with joy; and yet I sigh,
Such hushing melancholy awe I feel!
Alas that drowsy sleep should o'er me steal,
And to thy charms seal up my ravished eye.

We are occasionally asked by correspondents why they cannot obtain title-pages and tables of contents for the volumes of our Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts. In reply to these inquiries, we beg to say that titles and contents at the price of a number can always be had from the booksellers. Any bookseller who has not got them, can be supplied on demand.

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